

# The Sun.

## BOOKS AND THE BOOK WORLD

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SECTION  
FIVE

# Blister Us! 'Tis Lady Bet!

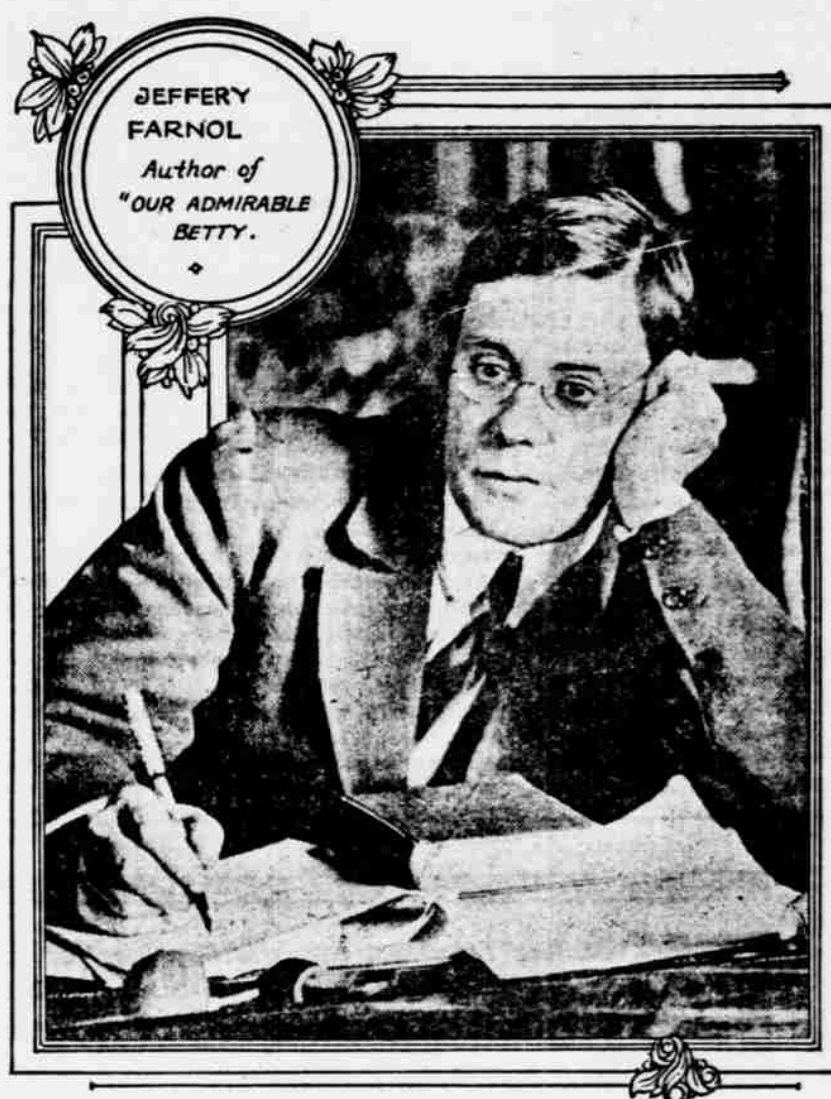
Our Admirable Jeffery Farnol Hath Writ Another Romance and an Extreme Entertaining and Joyous Tale of Love and Peril

LUD bless our poor perishing sawls, but what have we here? 'Tis a book, no less, and in the graceful 'scribed phrases of Mr. Jeffery Farnol, the skilled and adroit merryteller of *The Broad Highway*, only he is calling it after a lady of bewitching graces and even most bold deviltries (for a female)—*Our Admirable Betty*. A name, a toast and a slogan, that, for as brilliant a band of gallants as ever left London town to repair to the countryside and pay court to a beauty. Mistress—ten thousand pardons!—Lady Elizabeth Carlyon; you know her? you have seen her? "O sir, she is extreme beautiful, 'tis said! She is a toast adored! She is seen but to be worshipped! She hath wit, beauty and a thousand accomplishments! She hath such an air! Such a killing droop of the eyelash! She is—oh, she is irresistible!" And so, 't' faith, Major John d'Arcy found her. And so, 'ods blood, will full many a reader.

Divers fine gentlemen did faithfully and devotedly drag themselves through rural mire and kiss the hand of Lady Belinda Damain's wilful and capricious ward. There was the blooming Sir Benjamin Tripp who grew purple faced more than ordinary churning butter, our admirable Betty having a mind to play at dairy mistress this morning; Mr. Anthony Marchdale, who was languid and nineteen; Lord Alvaston, with clocked silk stockings; Captain West, be-ruffled; the Marquis of Alton, Sir Jasper Denholm, Mr. Dalroyd, of whom Lady Belinda said: "Such legs, my dear! O Gemini!" And there was Viscount Merivale, positively, yes positively, the most affected fellow that ever appeared at his prapereit in a mauve coat, carrying his gold laced hat lest to put it on discommode his peruke. For a hat, as Paneras, Viscount Merivale, told his nunky, the Major, is a thing "to show off one's hand, sir, to fan one's self gracefully, to be borne negligently 'neath the arm, to point a remark or lend force to an epigram, to woo and make love with, to offend and insult-with, 'tis for a thousand and one things, sir, but never, O, never to put on one's head—'tis a practice unmodish, reprehensible, and altogether damnable!" In other words, dem, sir, dem!

### The Lost Merry England.

It were unfair to go on in the style of Mr. Farnol's romance, just as it would be unfair not to have given the reader some taste of it. The story of *Our Admirable Betty* is timed—at least by the American publishers—in the earlier half of the eighteenth century. And indeed it may be taken as a not unfaithful picture of some aspects of England between 1700 and 1750. It is not, of course, the "merry England" of old (and truthful) tradition; for that was destroyed in the reign of Henry VIII.—or rather, its destruction dates from that reign. It is not the England of the greenwood nor of the bowmen of Agincourt, those valorous and immortal yeomen who came back visibly and fought like the hosts of God at Mons in 1514. It is the England of the Georges, the England of affectation in private and ostentation in public life, the England beginning to be squire ridden, the England in which men who were losing their old liberties had



not yet begun to submit to the new slaveries—out yet it was England, a home of liberty loving men, a home of spirited and gracious folk both great and humble. And of these Mr. Farnol has contrived to prison a number in the pages of his story. The other kind, too! What blacker villain than Mr. Dalroyd—he of the legs Lady Belinda deemed so splendid!

To transport a reader from all the cares of a thundering and fateful present clean away into the thrills and trivialities of two hundred years ago is no inconsiderable feat. Mr. Farnol does it in *Our Admirable Betty*; and, mind you, he cannot well be said to do it by virtue of intricate plot, by means of racking suspense, by involutions of an apparently insoluble mystery. These things are not the magnets he uses. Almost from the first chapter you are acquainted with the principal outcome of the book. The pairings are simple. There is Major John d'Arcy, 41, a veteran of the wars, clad in his Ramillies coat and writing his *History of Fortification*, meeting, across a party wall in the orchard, the bewitching Bet. There is also Sergeant Zebedee Tring, the Major's servant, and there is the Major's housekeeper, Mrs. Agatha. The ladies are provocative and the men are obtuse—but not impenetrably so. Voilà! as Sergeant Zeb might have said, he having learned certain words of French and Dutch while away at the wars, most of them regrettably less innocent than the one we put in his mouth.

### Where Thanks Are Due.

No, the magic that Mr. Farnol so successfully uses is the old and simple magic of atmosphere. With his archaic and quaint and preposterous (and laughable) dialogue he does actually and truly lift

us out of ourselves and plant us in the cherry orchard or in the great house Major d'Arcy has inherited, or in other romantic scenes and surroundings such as should set off the people of two hundred years ago as landscapes set off the hats, gowns, ribbons and lovely faces of the women Sir Joshua Reynolds portrayed. Mr. Farnol is a supreme master of his method in this sort of historical romancing. His tale is here almost all in dialogue; and the only difficulty whatever that would be experienced by a playwright in preparing it for the stage would be the problem of eliminating many scenes and speeches while yet preserving those scenes and those speeches which would condense and hurry forward the action, covering the ground completely in the two and a half or three hours which is the limit of a stage representation. The problem of humor and sparkle would not exist; for while Mr. Farnol's humor is frequently naive it is quite as frequently delicious; and when it is subtle it is very subtle and when it is pointed it is broadly pointed that all may feel the thrust and chuckle.

Now we submit that the writing of such a tale as *Our Admirable Betty* at this time—or any time—and the publication of it at this time—or any time—is something to be unaffectedly grateful for. For the very ephemerality of this novel assures it of a certain and a long life. It is a story that could have been enjoyed quite as well in 1898 as in 1918, and it will be possible to enjoy it as heartily in 1938 as to-day. Of how many novels can you say this? You cannot say it of any—even the most brilliant—which are concerned with modern affairs and people, for these will fade as fashions of thought fade. A fashion, mental or merely habilimental, that is twenty years old is impossibly old and neither thinkable nor wearable; but a fashion that is two centuries old is not only perfectly proper but pleasing and becoming. Nothing is more astonishing or more stable than the youthfulness of that which is very old.

God bless us! We are but simple folk, alack, and easily diverted, it may be. And yet we can find it in us to smile at Lady Belinda describing to Major d'Arcy her troubles with her ward: "If you only knew! The pranks she hath played me—so wild, so ungoverned, so—so unvirginal!" The Major winced. "I have known her to gallop her horse in the paddock—man fashion!" The Major looked relieved; perceiving which, Lady Belinda, sinking her voice, continued: "And once, sir, O heaven, can I ever forget! Once—O, I tremble to speak it! Once—" The Major flinched again. "Once, sir, she actually ventured forth dressed in—in—O, I blush!—in—O Modesty! O Purity!—in—O—!"

"Madam, a God's name—in what?"

"Male attire, sir—O, I burn!" . . .

"I can conceive your days have not been—un-eventful, mam."

Thank you, Mr. Farnol and Messrs. Little, Brown & Co. And may we have an occasional more?

OUR ADMIRABLE BETTY. BY JEFFERY FARNOL. Little, Brown & Co. \$1.60.